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24 November 2020

Matthew Try  
Headteacher  
Downham Market, Hillcrest Primary School  
Hillcrest  
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Dear Mr Try

### **Ofsted remote visit to Downham Market, Hillcrest Primary School**

Following my remote visit with Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 12 November 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the visit's findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss your actions since September 2020, when the government expected all schools to open fully to all pupils.

This visit was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections are temporarily suspended. Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the school.

Ofsted's visits to schools during the autumn term are not inspections. We are not giving graded judgements. We did not undertake the usual range of inspection activities and were unable to check other sources of evidence, such as visits to lessons or looking at pupils' work. The content of this letter gives an overview of our discussions about what has happened in your school this term.

During the visit, we spoke to you and the assistant headteacher, who are also the designated safeguarding leader and the special educational needs coordinator respectively. We did not speak to pupils.

## **Context**

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's education system is managing the return to full education for pupils, following an extended break in formal schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In undertaking this focused work, HMI are visiting a broad range of schools. HMI will visit a sample of:

- approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate)
- maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision, including those in cities, and coastal, town or rural communities.

The information from this visit will feed into Ofsted's national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector. We did not find any significant concerns during the visit. In such a case, an inspection report would be published on our website and available to parents and carers.

We did not consider your response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020, when the school was not open to all pupils.

### **From this visit, inspectors noted that:**

- At the time of the visit, no class 'bubbles' had needed to isolate so far this term. A small number of pupils have worked from home while waiting for COVID-19 test results.
- Pupils are currently following a 'recovery' curriculum. Before the school reopened in September 2020, staff highlighted key content that pupils had not fully covered in the previous year, across all subjects. Teachers used this information to draw up their recovery curriculum plans. All the usual subjects are covered, but staff adapt these according to pupils' needs. Leaders plan for pupils to return to their usual curriculum by the summer term 2021.
- Staff initially focused on pupils' well-being. Additional time was allocated to pupils' personal, social and health education and religious education. Staff wanted pupils to feel safe and to help them overcome any anxieties they might have on their return to school.
- Discussions, questioning, quizzes and tests are used to establish gaps in pupils' learning.

- Staff have focused on pupils' reading. Younger pupils have regressed in their use of phonics. Older pupils have become less fluent readers. Staff provide additional opportunities for pupils to practise reading throughout each day.
- The quality of pupils' handwriting, the content of their writing and their writing stamina have deteriorated. Staff plan specific activities to help pupils regain these skills.
- In mathematics, pupils have retained a good recall of number facts and times tables. Staff are focusing more on the content linked to shape, space and statistics and on pupils' problem-solving skills.
- Since September 2020, staff have focused more on helping pupils to catch up in English, mathematics and science. There has been an increasing emphasis on science during the latter part of this term. Other subjects, such as history and geography, have had reduced curriculum time.
- For remote learning, the work that pupils will complete each week is posted in advance on the school's website. Paper packs can be made available if required, and the work is the same as that completed by other pupils in class. Any pupil who is unable to attend school for reasons related to COVID-19 has access to this work from their first day of absence.

Thank you again for contributing to this important national work. The views and experiences you have shared will help to inform future policy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Randall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**